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ABSTRACT

The Grade 11 High School Proficiency Test (HSPT) and the New Jersey Early Warning Test (EWT) are two key standardized tests that indicate academic ability of county high school graduates which colleges will need to address. While HSPT scores for county high school districts reflect a range of competency in reading, math, and writing, the majority of Hudson County Community College (HCCC) students (71%) come from districts (Jersey City, Union City, and Guttenberg/West New York) that in general do not perform well on the three sections of the HSPT. When one considers the weak academic foundation of so many of the college's students, it should come as no surprise that a large number of students must take courses to develop basic math/English skills and that retention is a challenge for the college. The college must keep these results in mind as it projects needed resources to help upcoming, underprepared students make the transition to college readiness. Indeed, over the course of its history, HCCC has committed resources and sponsored a number of programs and initiatives designed to assist students in developing college ready skills. (JA)

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Understanding the High School Proficiency Test and the Early Warning Test in Relation to HCCC Enrollment Trends

Introduction

This report is intended to serve three purposes: first (through an analysis of the High School Proficiency Test and the Early Warning Test), to help the college understand more clearly the impact of students' primary and secondary academic development on their preparedness for college-level work; second, to provide data for upcoming program reviews, particularly Academic Foundations; and third, to assist the college as it develops a strategic plan.

The information presented here comes from several sources:

1. The New Jersey Department of Education (High School Proficiency Test and Early Warning Test results).

2. Enrollment Data Reports for Fall 1996, 1997, and 1998 (HCCC P&IR Reports 97.01-IDR, 97.16-IDR, and 98.09-IDR respectively).

3. Exploratory Analyses of Recent Graduates of Jersey City and Union City Public High Schools at HCCC (HCCC P&IR reports 99.0-SR and 99.13-SR).

It should be noted that the data from the New Jersey Department of Education were obtained through the department's web site at http://www.state.nj.us/njded. The growing availability of information through internet-based sources—as presented in this report—has enormous potential for facilitating institutional and other research at this college as well as at other institutions.

The High School Proficiency Test and the Early Warning Test

A key challenge facing Hudson County Community College is how best to respond to the academic needs of county high school graduates. This response can be determined in part by an understanding of student performance on two key standardized tests: the Grade 11 High School Proficiency Test (HSPT)--an indicator of academic ability that the college can expect to address in the relative short term—and the New Jersey Early Warning Test (EWT)—a similar indicator that can help the college project its response to student needs for the relative long term.

The HSPT and the EWT, administered to students in grades eleven and eight respectively, measure student ability in reading, mathematics, and writing. Students taking the HSPT must pass all three sections as one of the requirements to earn a high school diploma. Students who do not pass all three sections will receive additional instruction and will be retested on the section or sections they did not pass. The total HSPT reading, mathematics, and writing scores are reported as scale scores with a range of 100 to 500. The passing score on each of the three sections is 300. The EWT provides an indicator of students' progress in mastering the skills they will need to pass the HSPT. Scores on the EWT are reported as proficiency levels, with Level I representing clear competence in the skill area, Level II indicating at least minimal competence, and Level III indicating performance below the state minimum level of proficiency. Students scoring in Level II may or may not need remediation, while students scoring in Level III must receive instructional intervention.

Analysis of the HSPT

Reading Section

Table 1 (next page) presents HSPT scores for the fall 1997 and fall 1996 administrations for Hudson County high school districts. For reading, Weehawken, Bayonne, and Secaucus had the highest percent of students passing, with district rates of 84.3%, 84%, and 83.9% respectively. In the same category, Jersey City, Union City, and Hoboken had the lowest percentages of students passing, with rates of 55.5%, 56.5%, and 58.8% respectively. For the entire state, 84.0% of students taking the HSPT passed the reading section.

In terms of mean reading scores, Weehawken, Secaucus, and Bayonne scored highest, with 371.4, 364.5, and 359.7 respectively. Lowest scores were reported for Jersey City (310.4), Union City (312.6), and Hoboken (322.9). Statewide, the mean reading score was 371.3. As noted earlier, for all three sections of the HSPT, the passing score was 300.

Math Section

In the math section of the HSPT, districts with the highest rates of students passing were North Bergen (86.9%), Kearny (86%), and Bayonne (85.6%). Lowest rates were reported by Jersey City (56.0%), Hoboken (65.7%), and West New York (66.5%). Statewide, 85.9% passed the math section.

In terms of mean scores for math, highest scores were reported by Secaucus (379.3), Kearny (377.9), and North Bergen (377.1). Lowest scores were reported by Jersey City (319.7), Union City (331.2), and West New York (335.2). Statewide, the mean math score was 392.3 (passing = 300).

Writing Section

In terms of writing, highest passing rates were reported by Bayonne (88.8%), Secaucus (88.5%), and North Bergen (88%). Lowest rates were reported by Union City (62.7%), Jersey City (65.3%), and West New York (72.7%). For the entire state, 87.9% passed by the writing section.

Table 1

New Jersey High School Proficiency Test Fall 1997 and Fall 1996

Results for Hudson County

	South Hudson						West Hudson[1]				North Hudson[2]									
	Bayonne		Hoboken		Jersey City		Harrison		Kearny		North Bergen		Secaucus		Union City		Weehawken		West New York	
	1997	*1996*	1997	*1996*	1997	*1996*	1997	*1996*	1997	*1996*	1997	*1996*	1997	*1996*	1997	*1996*	1997	*1996*	1997	*1996*
District Factor Group[3]	B		B		A		A		B		B		FG		A		B		A	
Reading[4]	84	*77.2*	58.8	*55.4*	55.5	*49.7*	67.2	*77*	78.8	*81.1*	83	*79.4*	83.9	*79.8*	56.5	*54*	84.3	*66.7*	68.6	*69.4*
Math[4]	85.6	*86.4*	65.7	*68.3*	56	*56.3*	74.8	*82.3*	86	*86.6*	86.9	*84*	82.8	*85.2*	66.9	*65.1*	84.6	*73.9*	66.5	*77.8*
Writing[4]	88.8	*95.1*	76.8	*81.4*	65.3	*73.5*	73.3	*89.2*	87.6	*92.2*	88	*91.8*	88.5	*92.7*	62.7	*72.4*	78.4	*95.7*	72.7	*82.9*
Total HSPT Passing Rate	74.2	*70.9*	45.3	*46.4*	39	*38.5*	49.6	*67.4*	69.1	*71.4*	72.7	*68.8*	72.4	*73.4*	44.2	*40.1*	67.3	*56.5*	47	*56.8*
Reading Mean Score	359.7	*357.1*	322.9	*315.3*	310.4	*306.8*	332.4	*344*	353.9	*362.8*	358	*350.4*	364.5	*360.2*	312.6	*310.8*	371.4	*346.8*	331.1	*333.3*
Math Mean Score	371.6	*377.8*	339.2	*337.1*	319.7	*318.4*	357.6	*369.3*	377.9	*384.5*	377.1	*363.4*	379.3	*378.3*	331.2	*326*	374.3	*352.4*	335.2	*353.1*
Writing Mean Score	361.1	*375.3*	332.1	*335.4*	319.7	*330.8*	331.4	*349.7*	352.9	*361.9*	356.7	*352.9*	356.2	*371.2*	315.7	*329.4*	341.4	*353.9*	323.6	*334*

	McNair Academic[5]	
Reading	98.1	*98*
Math	100	*98*
Writing	100	*100*
Total	98.1	*96*
Reading Mean Score	420.9	*415.5*
Math Mean Score	441.1	*429.7*
Writing Mean Score	392.3	*400.3*

[1] Students from East Newark attend Harrison High School.

[2] Students from Guttenberg attend North Bergen High School.

[3] District factor groupings are indicators of socioeconomic status. Range is A (lowest socioeconomic status) to J (highest).

[4] Reading, math, and writing performance levels are reported as percents of students passing that section of the HSPT.

[5] Results for this Jersey City high school for students with high academic achievement presented as a basis for comparison.

Mean scores for writing included highest results reported by Bayonne (361.1), North Bergen (356.7), and Secaucus (356.2). Lowest scores were reported by Union City (315.7), Jersey City (319.7), and West New York (323.6). Statewide, the mean writing score was 361.3 (passing = 300).

The HSPT and Enrollment Trends for HCCC

The data presented above can provide a significant insight for the college—especially when viewed in conjunction with the college's enrollment trends according to municipality (see below) over the last few years.

Fall 1996-Fall 1998 Enrollment According to Hudson County Municipality								
Municipality	1996		1997		1998		3 Year Avg	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Bayonne	299	7	308	7	316	8	308	7
East Newark	52	1	62	1	74	2	63	2
Gutt/WNY	428	10	365	9	350	8	381	9
Hoboken	142	3	129	3	145	3	139	3
Jersey City	2023	49	2084	50	2056	49	2054	49
Kearny	97	2	101	2	103	2	100	2
North Bergen	331	8	353	8	366	9	350	8
Secaucus	44	1	39	1	27	1	37	1
Union City	550	13	537	13	544	13	544	13
Other	163	4	183	4	193	5	180	4
Totals	4129	100	4161	100	4174	100	4156	100

When averaged over 1996-1998, the largest portion of HCCC's enrollment comes from Jersey City, with an average enrollment of 2054 or 49% of the total HCCC population. The second greatest contributor to HCCC enrollment is Union City, with an average of 544 (13%). The college's third largest portion of enrollment comes from Guttenberg/West New York, with an average enrollment of 381 (9%). Municipalities with the smallest average enrollment contribution include Secaucus (n=37; 1%), East Newark (n=63; 2%), and Kearny (n=100; 2%).

A review of the enrollment data in conjunction with the data regarding student performance on the HSPT reveals that, for the most part, the college's primary sources of enrollment are the same municipalities with students who have performed most poorly on the HSPT.

Top Three Municipalities Ranked According to Student Contribution to HCC	HSPT Pass Rates Ranked According to Three Lowest Performance Levels		
	Reading	Math	Writing
1. Jersey City	1	1	2
2. Union City	2	X	1
3. Gutt/WNY	X*	3 (WNY only)	3 (WNY only)

*Note: X indicates performance above three lowest levels.

Analysis of the EWT

Reading Section

Table 2 (next page) presents EWT scores for the March 1998 administration for Hudson County school districts. For reading, the three districts with the greatest number of students scoring at Level I (highest competency) were East Newark with 63.2%, Bayonne with 62.5%, and Secaucus with 62.4%. Districts with the lowest number of students scoring at Level I included Union City (31.3%), Jersey City (33.1%), and Harrison (33.7%). For the entire state, 54.3% of students who attempted the reading section scored in Level I.

In terms of mean reading scores, the three highest scoring districts were Bayonne (152.6), Secaucus (152), and Weehawken (150.4). Lowest scores were reported for Jersey City (129.4), Union City (130), and Harrison (132.3). Statewide, the mean reading score was 144.9.

Math Section

In the math section of the EWT, districts with the highest number of students scoring at Level I included North Bergen with 50.4%, Hoboken with 43%, and Secaucus with 42.6%. Districts with the lowest number of students scoring at Level I were Guttenberg (17.7%), Jersey City (21.4%), and Union City (24.5%). For the entire state, 44.3% of students who attempted the math section scored in Level I.

In terms of mean math scores, the three highest scoring districts were North Bergen (149.2), Secaucus (144.1), and Hoboken (142.2). Lowest scores were reported for Jersey City (123.6), Guttenberg (127.4), and Union City (128.5). Statewide the mean math score was 142.0.

Writing Section

For the writing portion of the EWT, North Bergen, Hoboken, and West New York had the largest number of students scoring in Level I, with 68.3%, 66.9%, and 58.2% respectively. Districts with the lowest number of students scoring at Level I were Guttenberg (19.4%), Union City (22.4%), and Weehawken (28.2%). For the entire state, 53.7% of students attempting the writing section scored in Level I.

Districts with the highest mean scores were North Bergen with 168.2, Hoboken with 166.8, and Secaucus with 159.3. Lowest scores were reported for Guttenberg (115.1), Union City (115.2), and Harrison (118.4). Statewide, the mean writing score was 150.1.

The EWT and Enrollment Trends for HCCC

As with the HSPT, those municipalities scoring most poorly—for the most part—on the EWT contribute most highly to the college's enrollment.

Top Three Municipalities Ranked According to Student Contribution to HCC	EWT Level I Achievement Ranked According to Three Lowest Performance Levels		
	Reading	Math	Writing
1. Jersey City	2	2	X
2. Union City	1	3	2
3. Gutt/WNY	X*	1 (Gutt. only)	1 (Gutt. only)

*Note: X indicates performance above three lowest levels.

	A	C	E	G	H	J	L	N	P	R	T	V	X
1	**Table 2**												
2	**New Jersey Early Warning Test March 1998**												
3	**Results for Hudson County**												
4													
5													
6													
7		**South Hudson**			**West Hudson**					**North**	**Hudson**		
8		**Bayonne**	**Hoboken**	**Jersey City**	**E. Newark**	**Harrison**	**Kearny**	**Guttenberg**	**North Bergen**	**Secaucus**	**Union City**	**Weehawken**	**W. New York**
9	District Factor Group	**B**	**B**	**A**	**A**	**A**	**B**	**B**	**B**	**FG**	**A**	**B**	**A**
10	Reading												
11	Level III	2	9.9	17.9	10.5	11.6	8.8	3.2	4.8	3	16.6	1.4	9.5
12	Level II	35.5	44.6	49	26.3	54.7	50.9	51.6	41.1	34.7	52.2	40.8	54.9
13	Level I	**62.5**	**45.5**	**33.1**	**63.2**	**33.7**	**40.3**	**45.2**	**54.1**	**62.4**	**31.3**	**57.7**	**35.5**
14	Math												
15	Level III	6.3	8.3	24.8	5.3	8.4	13.2	14.5	4.8	3	15.9	8.5	10.2
16	Level II	54.2	48.8	53.8	68.4	57.9	55	67.7	44.8	54.5	59.5	62	55.1
17	Level I	**39.5**	**43**	**21.4**	**26.3**	**33.7**	**31.8**	**17.7**	**50.4**	**42.6**	**24.5**	**29.6**	**34.8**
18	Writing												
19	Level III	15.8	5.8	31.1	31.6	32.6	12.2	33.9	7.7	5	34.6	11.3	10.5
20	Level II	42.7	27.3	39.9	26.3	38.9	42.5	46.8	24	38.6	43	60.6	31.3
21	Level I	**41.6**	**66.9**	**29**	**42.1**	**28.4**	**45.3**	**19.4**	**68.3**	**56.4**	**22.4**	**28.2**	**58.2**
22													
23	Reading Mean Score	**152.6**	**141.2**	**129.4**	**141.5**	**132.3**	**139.2**	**144.9**	**147.6**	**152**	**130**	**150.4**	**136.4**
24	Math Mean Score	**141.7**	**142.2**	**123.6**	**137.3**	**137.2**	**133.9**	**127.4**	**149.2**	**144.1**	**128.5**	**135.1**	**137**
25	Writing Mean Score	**145**	**166.8**	**124.1**	**131.5**	**118.4**	**146.6**	**115.1**	**168.2**	**159.3**	**115.2**	**136.8**	**157.5**
26	Percent Levels I or II												
27	1998	79.4	81.8	57.8	57.9	62.1	76.9	62.9	88.3	93.1	58.2	83.1	80
28	1997	86.5	78.1	58.9	88.9	72.1	75.2	72.4	87.1	90.8	65.7	85.1	71.1
29	Percent Level I												
30	1998	20.6	30.6	12.8	15.8	14.7	18.4	6.5	33.3	26.7	9.5	16.9	17
31	1997	29.6	27.6	14.4	44.4	20.7	18.9	13.8	34.2	35.8	11	13.5	11

Conclusions

While HSPT scores for county high school districts reflect a range of competency in reading, math, and writing, the majority of HCCC students (71%) come from districts (Jersey City, Union City, and Guttenberg/West New York) that in general do not perform well on the three sections of the HSPT. In essence, this would indicate that a large number of the students from these districts are underprepared for college. This is evidenced, for example, by the five-year average—fall 1994 to fall 1998--placement of 59% of Jersey City high school graduates in Basic Skills/Academic Foundations (AF) courses (remaining students are 35% program/fully degree ready and 6% ESL).

It should be noted that, in a study (Exploratory Analysis of Recent Graduates of Jersey City Public High Schools at HCCC, Report 99.01-SR, January 1999) of three cohorts for fall 1994, fall 1995, and fall 1996, Jersey City high school graduates—when compared with graduates of other New Jersey high schools (mainly Hudson County high schools)—were less likely than students of other New Jersey high schools to be program-ready. HCCC's second largest source of enrollment, Union City, reflects a similar academic placement pattern, with 55% of Union City high school graduates in AF courses (remaining students are 34% program ready and 11% ESL).

When one considers the weak academic foundation of so many of the college's students, it should come as no surprise that:

1. A large number of students must take AF courses.
2. Retention is a challenge for the college, especially in view of the unpreparedness of these students for the rigors of college work.

As mentioned earlier in this report, an understanding of how county students score on the HSPT is important for the college as it develops relatively short-term plans to meet the challenges faced by potential HCCC students from poorly performing districts. However, the college must also be aware of academic trends indicated by the EWT. It would not be unreasonable to assume that districts with poor performance on the EWT will see generally similar results once the same students take the HSPT. Such trends cannot help but impact on the college's longer term planning as it projects resources needed to help upcoming underprepared students make the transition to college readiness.

Indeed, over the course of its history HCCC has committed resources and participated in the sponsorship of a number of programs and initiatives designed to assist students in developing college-ready skills. These include an extensive Academic Foundations/Basic Skills program, college survival skills courses, proficiency testing in early skills courses (e.g., College Composition I), Student Support Services Program (SSSP), and Educational Opportunity (EOF) Fund. Nevertheless, as it is faced with new challenges—distance/online learning, penetrating new markets, and development of new programs–Hudson County Community College must be vigilant about the needs of its current clientele base as it balances those and new needs in the allocation of resources—resources that are generally less than needed and often hard-won.